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Part 1: News Analysis

The European Union greeted Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov November 5-6, eager to lay the groundwork for an agreement about much-needed energy supply and security and counter the need for dependence on Russia. The Turkmen president met European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso and the commissioners for external relations, trade and energy, as well as EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana and NATO officials.

Yet Berdymukhamedov encountered some possibly unexpected resistance in Brussels. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU's commissioner for foreign relations, explained to the Turkmen leader that progress in the area of human rights could unblock the interim trade agreement stalled last year, and could create new economic opportunities in Europe, Reuters reported.

A year ago, the European Parliament's Committee for International Trade froze its approval of a provisional trade accord between the EU and Turkmenistan until Ashgabat made "apparent, discernible, and consistent progress in the sphere of human rights." Showing some unexpectedly firm linkage between trade and rights, Ferrero-Waldner told the Turkmen leader, "the more open you are, obviously the more open the European Parliament will be and closer cooperation is possible," Reuters reported. She welcomed the creation of a commission to help implement European human rights agreements, but said "more must be done".

The Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR) welcomed EU-Turkmen cooperation in a public appeal timed to the Turkmen president's visit, but expressed concern that the huge influx of energy revenues are not safeguarded by transparency and accountability. Human rights resolutions at the United Nations and the European Parliament about fundamental rights for non-governmental groups and the media, for example, have gone unheeded. "Minor changes, non-substantial in nature, which are being implemented by the new president, do not affect the basics of the political system and therefore cannot be called democratic reforms," says TIHR. The human rights group pointed to continued control of all media, NGOs, religious groups and trade unions and called on EU leaders to link any agreement with the president of Turkmenistan "to feasible positive reforms in the area of human rights and liberties in our country. The Turkmen authorities must learn to respect and abide by norms and principles of international law and recognize the rights of their own citizens."

The International Crisis Group, in an op-ed piece in the EU Observer, noted that gestures like the opening of Internet cafes, so welcomed in the West, come with so many old-style restrictions like the blocking of dissident sites and monitoring by police that they become cosmetic. Human rights groups have listed benchmarks for real progress, including the release of remaining political prisoners, opening up of access to prisons by the International Committee of the Red Cross, and freedom of operation for local and international non-governmental organizations.

While these concerns are being articulated by some, business deals are proceeding apace. The British government has concluded a memorandum of understanding with Turkmenistan to open up access to oil and gas fields. And Turkmenistan foreign policy triumph on the Eastern front did not face the human rights conditionality that relations with the West has entailed. President Berdymukhamedov met with China's

Premier Wen Jiabao on November 4, and sealed an agreement to receive a US \$300 million loan on easy terms to purchase construction equipment. China already has 46 operational projects totaling US \$902 million and 1.5 billion in Chinese yuan [US \$195 million] in Turkmenistan, the State News Agency reported.

Part 2: News Digest

Summary: President Berdymukhamedov made his first trip as president to Europe for EU talks and found overtures for business and educational cooperation but also conditionality on human rights improvements before a trade agreement moves forward. Human rights groups urged further releases of political prisoners and access for international monitors. Following a meeting with the Chinese Premier, Turkmenistan finalized a \$300 million low-interest loan for developing a pipeline to deliver gas to China.

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. EU Welcomes New Turkmen Leader for Talks on Energy, Human Rights

Source: rferl.org/11/05/07. Excerpted by OSI Turkmenistan Project. Copyright (c) 2007. RFE/RL, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036.

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/11/215b858d-a80e-4892-81ca-66804f8a68ec.html>

Excerpt: Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, beginning a landmark two-day visit to Brussels November 5, received a cautiously upbeat welcome from top EU officials, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported. Among others, he met with the president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs, and EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson.

Some EU officials have told RFE/RL that the EU is offering closer ties and aid in exchange for further moves by the Turkmen leader to lead his country away from its autocratic mold. Yet the EU appears determined to secure better access to Turkmen natural gas -- regardless of the state of Ashgabat's rights record. Optimists suggest there are grounds for hope on human rights, however. Less than a year into his tenure, Berdymukhamedov has taken steps to reverse the late President Saparmurat Niyazov's policy of isolation. He has authorized limited social and educational reforms. He also appears willing at least to field EU and other international bodies' questions about the human rights situation in Turkmenistan.

At this point, that appears to be enough to maintain the EU's interest. European Commission officials say the bloc's commissioner for external relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, told Berdymukhamedov today that the EU "welcomes" his course so far. Christina Hohmann, the commissioner's spokeswoman, said after the meeting that Ferrero-Waldner held out the promise of closer ties and more EU assistance in return for reforms. "Commissioner [Ferrero-Waldner] made very clear [that] a lot needs to be done, and the more Turkmenistan does, the more the door to Europe and our further assistance [will] open up," Hohmann told RFE/RL. Officials say the EU is particularly encouraged by the Turkmen president's recent decision to release 11 political prisoners, including the country's former chief mufti. They also welcome the setting up of a governmental "institute" on human rights, and the Turkmen authorities' newfound willingness to talk to UN envoys about rights issues and democracy. Still, one commission official who asked not to be named noted today that Berdymukhamedov "made no promises" at today's meeting. Nor are any news conferences scheduled to follow any of his talks in Brussels -- an apparent reminder that the possible opening up of Turkmenistan is likely to be a slow process, at best.

[Passage omitted on scheduled meetings with top EU official on drug trade and Afghanistan.]

EU officials say the "conditionality" spelled out to Berdymukhamedov will mostly affect whether Turkmenistan can upgrade the Soviet-era trade agreement it has with the EU. An enhancement to a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement would mean closer political contacts and more aid money. The EU has earmarked 30 million euros (\$43 million) for the period through 2010. But that sum is dwarfed by the potential windfall that Turkmenistan could reap from direct energy trade with the EU. The EU estimates Turkmenistan's proven natural-gas reserves at 2.9 trillion cubic meters, making them the world's 10th-largest. Ashgabat claims it has more, but even its proven reserves guarantee keen EU interest.

Officials in Brussels concede that -- short of a catastrophic reversal in Turkmenistan's rights situation -- they will continue to pursue the energy trade regardless of progress in other areas. The bloc made overtures to Berdymukhamedov's predecessor and has been impressed by both leaders' ability to stand up to Russia's state-controlled gas monopoly, Gazprom. Gazprom currently buys up most of Turkmenistan's gas at \$100 per 1,000 cubic meters, but Ashgabat is said to be seeking a price of \$150.

[Passage omitted on tripartite agreement in May 2007 about construction of a new Caspian pipeline; EU need for guarantees that Turkmenistan can export enough gas and meeting of Caspian states planned for November 23.]

EU spokeswoman Hohmann said that in a groundbreaking move, dozens of Turkmen scientists and researchers will soon be able to study and work in the EU for limited periods. "For 2008 and 2009, some 40 Turkmen scientists have gained access to the [EU's] 'Tempus' and 'Erasmus Mundus' programs to work and study in the European Union at universities [here]," Hohmann said.

b. EU Commissioner Stresses Need for Human Rights Progress to Unblock Trade Agreement

Original Title: EU Urges More Turkmen Progress on Rights. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Reuters/11/05/07

Full version: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/oilRpt/idUKL0541094720071105>

Synopsis: EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner discussed with President Berdymukhamedov the possibility of a future agreement on energy and welcomed Turkmenistan's decision to establish a rights commission and a rights project with the United Nations.

While parliament's position does not prevent an agreement on energy, Ferrero-Waldner said more must be done to unblock the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement drafted to replace a narrower Soviet-era trade deal. Quoting Ferrero-Waldner, an EU official noted, "She said 'the more open you are, obviously the more open the European Parliament will be and closer cooperation is possible'." .

c. Turkmen leader, EU Trade Chief Discuss Boosting Ties

Source: BBC Monitoring--Central Asia/Official Turkmen Government Website/11/05/07

Today, as part of his working visit to the Kingdom of Belgium, Turkmen President Berdymukhamedov met Peter Mandelson, the European commissioner for trade, at the European Union headquarters, BBC Monitoring reported, citing the official Turkmen government website.

[Passage omitted: Mandelson is quoted as praising Turkmenistan]

During the meeting, views were exchanged in an interested manner on the current state and priority areas of and prospects for expanding bilateral partnership, in particular, on investment issues. The sides stated that the established dialogue was at a high level, and considered it necessary to bring a new impetus and a new quality to it, taking the existing mutual potential into consideration.

Turkmenistan is always open for business cooperation on an equal footing that is based on the principles of trust and mutual benefit, Berdymukhamedov stressed during the meeting. He also cited the example of long-standing fruitful cooperation with several famous European companies, which are actively participating in the implementation of large-scale projects in Turkmenistan.

[Passage omitted: background]

Confirming European countries' high interest and readiness for establishing full-scale cooperation with Turkmenistan, Mandelson stressed that the Turkmen market was exclusively promising and had huge economic and resource potential. He spoke of a firm intention to steadily develop the established mutually-beneficial cooperation, and described as positive Turkmenistan's steps to improve national legislation and to create all conditions for foreign business to develop, in particular, the favorable investment climate.

[Passage omitted: Berdymukhamedov invited Mandelson to visit Turkmenistan]

d. EU Leadership Praises "Progressive" Turkmen Reforms: TV

Source: BBC Monitoring--Central Asia/Official TV Altyr Assyn/11/05/07. Excerpt prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=1&id=071105c>

Excerpt: [Passage omitted: on president's departure and arrival.]

Our esteemed president will meet high-level leaders of the European Union at the headquarters of the European Commission. [On November 5] as part of his working visit, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov came to the headquarters of the European Commission in the capital of the Kingdom of Belgium. There, our esteemed president met the commissioner of the European Union for international relations and European neighborhood policy, Ms Benita Ferrero-Waldner.

Welcoming the high-level Turkmen guest, Ms Benita Ferrero-Waldner noted that she had heard a lot about wide-scale reforms initiated in Turkmenistan on the new stage of its modern history. Having expressed support on behalf of the European Union for the policy of progressive reforms initiated by the Turkmen leader, the EU commissioner sincerely congratulated Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov and all Turkmen people on substantial successes, which resulted from the realization of that policy.

[Passage omitted: on importance of president's visit for cooperation and commissioner's plans for visit to Ashgabat.]

Having thanked for the kind words, Berdymukhamedov noted that on his part he regarded the visit to Brussels as a particularly significant event from the point of view of the successful continuation of the dialogue with the European Union. At the same time, the Turkmen leader underlined that the European direction had been and would remain one of the priorities of the foreign policy of Turkmenistan. Consistently implementing the "open doors" policy, we are ready for a very wide and close cooperation with the European Union on equitable and mutually beneficial basis, he said and noted that as of today, the sides had substantial successful experience of multifaceted collaboration, particularly as part of the EU TACIS program. During the meeting, the sides discussed the main areas and opportunities for developing effective cooperation, particularly in the agriculture and humanitarian sphere, as well as in the area of law, administration and management, resolution of border issues and other areas. Partnership in the sphere of education became a separate topic for discussion, since its one of the key components of Turkmenistan's state policy. Ms Benita Ferrero-Waldner invited Turkmenistan to take part in special programs of the European Union on higher education by noting that such programs also exist in the area of assisting local authorities. The EU commissioner also gave a high assessment to the state strategy of developing all villages and towns, which is being realized in Turkmenistan and is directed at gradually increasing people's living standards.

During the meeting, Ms Benita Ferrero-Waldner welcomed social and economic reforms implemented in Turkmenistan and particularly the decision on the creation of the Institute of Strategic Planning and Economic Development, which in her opinion will allow the foundation for the prosperous and reliable future of the country to be laid already today. The EU commissioner also highly evaluated specific steps of Turkmenistan on building civil society, including the formation of the interagency commission on ensuring the implementation of international obligations of Turkmenistan in the area of human rights.

[Passage omitted: on usefulness of European experience in resolving humanitarian and social issues and educational programs for Turkmen in Europe.]

In the context of discussing cooperation in the strategic fuel and energy sphere, Berdymukhamedov again underlined the adherence of Turkmenistan to the concept of multiple options in the transportation of Turkmen energy to the world market.

[Passage omitted: on invitation to Ferrero-Waldner to visit Ashgabat and EU initiative to open Europa House in Ashgabat in 2008 and on meeting with European commission for trade.]

[Passage omitted: on official dinner with Barroso.] The Turkmen leader described his country's position regarding types and methods of mutual collaboration and stressed that a priority in these relations is given to open cooperation based on the principles of equality and trust. There is no room for political opportunism or any type of pressure. In his turn, Mr. Barroso talked about the intensification of cooperation with Turkmenistan and searching for individual approaches to cooperation with the country possessing huge potential.

[Passage omitted: on plans for meeting with other EU officials.]

e. Turkmen President, Belgian Premier Discuss Cooperation

Source: *Interfax/11/06/07. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Synopsis: Turkmen President Berdymukhamedov and Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt discussed cooperation between Turkmenistan and Belgium at a meeting in Brussels on November 6, Interfax reported, citing the State News Agency (TDH)

"Exchange of opinions on a broad range of issues related to mutually beneficial cooperation took place in the course of the negotiations. Expressing his country's keen interest in developing close business contacts with Turkmen partners, Mr. Guy Verhofstadt proposed sending a large delegation to Turkmenistan comprising officials from the Belgian Economy Ministry and representatives from leading Belgian companies. He emphasized Belgium's special interest in cooperation in the fuel and energy sector, in particular, through launching a modern gas liquefaction facility in Turkmenistan and then taking this highly needed product to world energy markets," TDH reported.

The Turkmen president invited Belgian companies to participate in the construction of the national tourist zone on the Caspian coast and also to bid in international tenders for the construction of new cement plants in Turkmenistan. Among priorities in bilateral cooperation, the two also discussed the healthcare sector, including the pharmaceutical industry, and the educational sector, in which a large-scale reform has lately been launched at the president's initiative.

f. EU Should Keep to Basic Conditions Before Approving Trade Agreement: ICG

Original title: *[Comment] What the EU Should Expect From Turkmenistan. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *EU Observer/11/05/07*

Full version: <http://euobserver.com/7/25089>

Synopsis: European Commission President Manuel Barroso and three senior European Commissioners received President Berdymukhamedov on November 5, but it is hoped they took the opportunity to remind the Turkmen leader that the EU's friendship has a price, Ivo Schutte, EU Advocacy Manager of the International Crisis Group, commented in an article on euobserver.com

The European Parliament said a year ago that it would only approve an Interim Trade Agreement with Turkmenistan "if concrete progress on the human rights situation is achieved." Despite hopes for change after the death of past president Saparmurat Niyazov, "one can so far see no trace of any significant improvements," says Schutte. While not commissioning gold statues of himself, "his government" is pretty much the same oppressive regime familiar from the Turkmenbashi days," he said, using the term "Leader of Turkmen" by which Niyazov was known.

Schutte characterizes some Westerners as grasping at straws, ready to hail as great progress the opening of a single Internet cafe in Ashgabat, despite its prohibitive price, blocking of some sites, and the presence of soldiers guarding the doors. The release of 9,000 prisoners did not include some prominent political prisoners. Still, the change in leadership is an opportunity for the EU. "If handled smartly and consistently, renewed contacts with the Turkmen leadership could help produce some actual changes on the ground," Schutte says. He advocates keeping basic conditions in place before the Interim Trade Agreement could be signed. These include access for the International Committee of the Red Cross; upgrading of the education system to international standards; release of all prisoners of conscience and political prisoners; an end to government travel restrictions; freedom for independent human rights groups to operate; and freedom of operation for UN human rights monitors

g. Appeal by the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights to the EU

Original title: *Address by the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights to the European Union.*

Source: *Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights. Excerpted by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Full version: <http://www.chrono-tm.org/?02520435280000000000000011000000>

Excerpt: The Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR) perceives the collaboration between the European Union and Turkmenistan in politics, economy, culture, education and other areas as mutually beneficial for both sides. Yet, we are concerned with the fact that Turkmenistan remains a totalitarian state with a single-party political system and non-transparent economy. Huge inflows of cash the country generates from sale of energy resources as well as spending of these funds by the government remain an unveiled secret to the Turkmen residents. For about 15 years the rights of the citizens have been curtailed and since Turkmenistan gained independence the country's residents have been experiencing first-hand "delights" of the dictatorial regime.

[Passage omitted: on human rights resolutions passed expressing concern about Turkmenistan at the UN and European Parliament.]

Regrettably, despite the fact that much time has passed and the country's leader has been changed, virtually all issues set forth in the aforementioned international documents remain up-to-date even in the present time. Minor changes, non-substantial in nature, which are being implemented by the new President, do not affect the basics of the political system and therefore cannot be named democratic reforms.

As in previous years the activities of mass media, non-governmental organizations, religious associations, trade unions in Turkmenistan are not only controlled by the state, but in practice are governed by the governmental agencies. The authorities do not even try to conceal this. On October 11 at a government session the Minister of Economy and Finance announced that effective 2008 wages and salaries would be increased, the employees of NGOs including. At the same time the administration of the Dashoguz velayat (the northern region of the country) has announced a tender to build a mosque in Dashoguz. These are just two examples of how the endorsed laws are being violated by the authorities.

[Passage omitted: on background to suspension of interim trade agreement.]

The Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights shows deep respect to the European Union for the consistent and principled position in defending the rights and freedoms of the Turkmenistani citizens. In the mean time, taken into account the appalling conditions the population of the country, which is absolutely deprived of all their rights, has been exposed to, we call for the leaders of the European Union to link all potential agreements with the President of Turkmenistan to the feasible positive reforms in the area of human rights and liberties in our country. The Turkmen authorities must learn to respect and abide by norms and principles of international law and recognize the rights of their own citizens.

h. EU Should Focus on Rights During President's Visit to Brussels: Human Rights Watch

Original title: *EU Should Focus on Rights During President's Visit to Brussels: Welfare Improvements but Denial of Civic Freedoms in Turkmenistan* Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/11/02/turkme17226.htm>

Synopsis: The EU should urge President Berdymukhamedov, to reinstate fundamental civil and political rights in Turkmenistan, Human Rights Watch said in a briefing paper released November 2. While Berdymukhamedov has begun to reverse some of the most ruinous social policies of Niyazov's rule and to end the country's international isolation, the government remains one of the most repressive and authoritarian in the world, the rights group said.

"The EU should look at the new Turkmen government's record not only by comparing it to Niyazov's tyrannical rule but by setting a higher bar for progress," said Holly Cartner, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "To do otherwise is to lose a crucial opportunity for change at a time when the government of Turkmenistan is defining its future path."

Since coming to power, President Berdymukhamedov has reinstated social and educational programs and re-started foreign exchanges, but such social reforms "cannot but be an improvement over the disastrous policies of the Niyazov era," said Cartner. "But Turkmenistan's continued repression of civil society allows no independent institutions to scrutinize developments in these areas. Moreover, we don't see any commitment to reform in civil and political rights."

The briefing paper calls for the immediate release of Mukhametkuli Aymuradov, Annakurban Amanklychev, and Sapardurdy Khajiev, who were convicted on politically motivated charges during the Niyazov era. Hundreds of people, perhaps more, languish in Turkmen prisons after unfair trials on possibly politically motivated charges, the rights group said, and called for the government to establish a nationwide process to ensure a remedy for victims of injustice during the Niyazov era and through the present. The paper also describes harsh restrictions on freedom of the press and assembly; human rights groups cannot function properly due to government threats and harassment. While some individuals have been permitted to travel abroad, the system of foreign travel restrictions inherited from the Niyazov era remains in place.

"Denial of freedom of expression, association, religion, and movement were egregious and longstanding aspects of Niyazov's tyranny, and we're just not seeing improvements in most of these areas," said Cartner. "The EU should stick to its own criteria for engagement and insist on progress before it deepens its relationship with Turkmenistan on specific reform," she said.

i. Chinese Leader Makes Official Visit to Turkmenistan.

Original title: *Wen Jiabao Arrives in Ashgabat for Official Visit to Turkmenistan*
Source: *BBC Monitoring/Government of China, Foreign Ministry Website/11/04/07*

Excerpt: On November 3, 2007, Premier Wen Jiabao of China arrived in Ashgabat, capital of Turkmenistan, starting his official visit to Turkmenistan, BBC Monitor reported, citing the Chinese Foreign Ministry website.

[Passage omitted: on reception at the airport by Turkmen Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov, Chinese ambassador, Chinese-funded institutions, and students.]

In a written statement delivered at the airport, Wen highlighted the time-honored traditional friendship between the Chinese and Turkmen peoples, saying that the two nations, as friendly, close neighbors, have made tremendous progress in bilateral ties since the establishment of diplomatic ties 15 years ago. Both sides have supported each other on key issues involving their state sovereignty and territorial integrity, with increasing mutual trust and expanding trade cooperation. They have also closely coordinated their actions in multinational frameworks such as the United Nations, which has effectively safeguarded the common interests of the two nations.

This is the first visit to Turkmenistan by a Chinese premier in about 13 years--the last such visit was made in 1994. During his stay in the country, Wen will hold official talks with President Berdymukhamedov, and meet with Akdzhah Nurberdyeva, chairman of the Turkmen Assembly. The two sides will exchange in-depth views on consolidating their traditional friendship and expanding pragmatic cooperation in all areas, as well as other regional and international issues of common concern.

[Passage omitted on Wen's trip to Uzbekistan.]

j. PRC's Cao Gangchuan, Turkmenistan Counterpart Agree to Promote Military Ties

Source: *Xinhua/11/06/07. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Synopsis: Chinese Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan and his counterpart Agagelgy Mametgeldiyev of Turkmenistan held talks in Beijing November 5, agreeing to promote bilateral military ties. "The Chinese armed forces are ready to develop the friendly and cooperative ties in various fields and at multiple levels with the armed forces of Turkmenistan," said Cao, also vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission.

Cao said the two countries have enjoyed mutual trust, conducted extensive political, economic and trade and cultural cooperation, and supported each other in international affairs. Mametgeldiyev said the armed forces of Turkmenistan are ready to join hands with the People's Liberation Army of China to promote their cooperation and friendship.

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. Baptist Freed, Jehovah's Witness Threatened With New Sentence in Turkmenistan

Source: *Forum 18 News Service/11/08/07. Synopsis by Forum 18 News Service.*
Full version: http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1044

Synopsis: Baptist prisoner of conscience Vyacheslav Kalataevsky has been freed after being amnestied from a three-year labor camp sentence, Forum 18 News Service reported. "My wife Valentina wrote an official statement that I will not violate the law," he told Forum 18. "I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to all who

3. ECONOMIC NEWS

Source: [gundogar.org/11/11/07/State News Agency\(TDH\)/11/04/07](http://gundogar.org/11/11/07/State%20News%20Agency(TDH)/11/04/07)

The president noted that 46 investment projects with Chinese capital totaling \$920.5 million and about 1.5 billion Chinese yuan [about US \$195 million] were registered at 17 Turkmen enterprises and in 9 months of 2007, trade had reached \$303 million. An agreement was signed providing Turkmenistan with a loan on favorable terms of \$300 m to purchase construction equipment.

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